

THE HEXAPLA OF MYSTERY

NO. 1087

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest
in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the
Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."
1 Timothy 3:16.*

THE apostle tells us in the preceding verse that the Lord has a double design in maintaining His church in the world. The first is that it may be the place of His abode, for the church of the living God is "the house of God," the home wherein He reveals Himself unto His own children, the resting place of His love which He has of old appointed. JEHOVAH still inhabits the praises of Israel, and still He fulfills His promise to His chosen, "I will dwell in them and walk in them." (2 Co 6:16). Blessed is the church which has realized this first design of God, and so has continued to enjoy the Lord's presence and power. May we in this place be a building fitly framed together, and grow unto a holy temple in the Lord, for a habitation of God through the Spirit.

God's next purpose in sustaining a church in the world is that it may preserve and uphold His truth among men, for the church of the living God is "the pillar and ground of the truth." The Gospel must be believed, practiced, and proclaimed by men of God, or it will not have power. God does not trust the conservation of His truth to books, or to the most accurately written creeds, or to some one person supposed to be infallible, but He puts the incorruptible seed into the hearts of His chosen, and in such good soil its vitality and its growth secure its preservation. Even the inspired word, as a letter, has small power till it gains a lodging place for the truth in a warm heart, and then it grows and yields fruit, till its boughs spread far and wide, and its seeds are wafted on the wings of every wind, to spring up on the hills and among the valleys where none had looked for them.

As long as one copy of the Holy Scriptures remains in the world we shall have the pure truth among us, but it will be like an unplanted seed. For the propagation of the Gospel, human voices are required, for the establishment and confirmation of it among men, human lives are needed, and God intends that His Gospel shall be set forth and held up, published, defended, maintained, and supported in the world by His church, not alone by His ministers, nor by a hierarchical establishment, but by the entire company of faithful men. To the sacramental host of His elect has He committed the banner of the truth, which they are always to unfold, and carry on by the power of His Spirit, from victory to victory. In this sense, the church of the living God is, and ever must be, "the pillar and ground of the truth," let us take care, in our measure to make her so.

While dealing with this question, it was most fitting for the apostle to tell us what the truth is, and now is the most proper time for each one of us to learn the vital and essential truths which the church of God is forever to maintain. Our text is for this reason deeply interesting, it deals not with questionable and debatable topics, but with things verily, and indeed, received among us. Its testimony is short, but weighty. We cannot spare a single word from it, and it would be a crime to add anything to it. The apostle calls it a "mystery," and so, indeed, it is, for exceeding greatness of meaning, but not for obscurity of language, for it is as plain as it is full. Neither is it a mystery because it speaks of recondite opinions, or philosophical theories, for it deals only with facts, and is an historical summary of actual occurrences.

Observe that the comprehensive summary of the Gospel here given is contained in six little sentences, which run with such regularity of measure in the original Greek, that some have supposed them to be an ancient hymn, and it is possible that they may have been used as such in the early church. There is a poetic form about the six sentences. You are aware, of course, that the Orientals do not consider it essential to sacred psalms and hymns that they should resound with jingling rhymes, we are the slaves of mere sound in that respect, but they are free. Their fashion of verse-making has more respect to the sense than ours, and lies, as a rule, very much in introducing pleasant parallels and contrasts. These you have here, whether the six paragraphs are verses of a hymn or no.

Note that “manifest in *the flesh*” is contrasted with “justified in *the spirit*,” “seen of angels,” who are nearest to the throne of God, is fitly set by the side of “preached unto the Gentiles,” who stand at the opposite pole, and are far off. And then the third duplicate is made up of the evident opposites, “believed on *in the world*,” “received up *into glory*.” Thus, all through, the lights and shades are set over against each other by evident design.

Moreover, you will perceive an equally plain parallelism, if you will read attentively. The first two stanzas deal with the revealing of the Lord Jesus, He is manifest in the flesh, and He is yet more fully made manifest by being justified in the spirit. Then follows a making known of the Lord by sight to angels, and by hearing to the Gentiles, and in the third pair of lines, there is a twofold reception—the one by grace among men who believe, and the other into His actual glory in heaven. To all this add that pairs are also discernable in the first and last, the second and fourth, and the two middle lines. Just for an instant notice that the first clause of the series deals with Christ’s descent, and the last with His ascent, the second and the fifth are both intensely spiritual, and the third and fourth have to do with the senses only. Thus you find another set of parallels, whose existence can hardly be a mere accident.

Note this, for it teaches us that our memories need to be helped and strengthened in every way, and so it is well to have condensed truth to carry about with us, and exceedingly advantageous to us to have it arranged for us in such a shape that we are likely to recollect it. The apostle has been led by the Spirit to give us goodly words, helping our infirmities, of this help we should gratefully avail ourselves to the utmost. If we are somewhat instructed in the Word we have here an example of practical usefulness, we may for ourselves and for others, especially for the young, try to put the truth into forms which will help it to retain its hold upon the memory.

I shall call my text a hexapla of essential truth, a six-fold mystery of godliness. You have six great points clearly set forth before you, and these constitute the main, the essential elements of our holy faith, which the church of God is forever to set forth, and uphold to the end of time.

The apostle has said, “Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness.” When he says “without controversy,” I suppose he means that there ought to be no controversy about these facts, though controversies have arisen concerning them, and always will, since the most self-evident truth will always find self-evident fools to contradict it. He means that, in the church of God, at any rate, there is no question about these fundamentals. Outside of the church these statements are denied, but inside the house of God no one ever questions them for a moment, and he who does so is by that very act proven to have no part nor lot in the matter.

Without controversy all Christians agree that these are truths, and also that they are no trifles, but involve a mystery, and a great mystery, that is to say, that they were things hidden in themselves, and so concealed that reason could not have found them out, and even now, though they are revealed, they concern matters so vast and so profound that none of us comprehend them to the full, and the best instructed scribe in the kingdom recognizes in them infinite depths which he cannot hope fully to explore. The facts are unquestioned by the church of God, and are without dispute, among the faithful, regarded as containing in their inner depths a world of weighty meaning, even the great mystery of godliness.

Have you ever noticed that there are six New Testament mysteries? There may be more, but these six are the chief. The first is the mystery of the incarnation, which is now before us, “Great is the

mystery of godliness, God was manifest in the flesh.” The next is the mystery of the union of Christ with His church, of which we read, in Ephesians 5:31-32, “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church.” Thrice blessed union with Jesus, may our souls find their heaven in Your holy mystery—

*“Oh teach us, Lord, to know and own
This wondrous mystery,
That Thou with us art truly ONE,
And we are ONE with Thee!”*

The third mystery is the mystery of the calling of the Gentiles, to which Paul refers in Ephesians 3:4-6, where he says, “Whereby, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ; which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.” Herein we have a joyful portion, for which we can never be too grateful. The fourth mystery concerns the Jews, and deals with the restoration of Israel, whom we ought to remember with abounding sympathy and brotherly love. Of this you will read in Romans 11:25-26, “For I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”

For a fifth mystery I would bid you remember the doctrine of the removal of corruption from the body, and of its resurrection as spoken of in the famous passage, “Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.” And then, alas! to close the list, there is that mystery of iniquity which began to work so soon, and works yet more and more of evil.

Our text, then, is one of six mysteries, but it has this pre-eminence, that it is a *great* mystery, and is besides peculiarly *the* mystery. It is called “the mystery of godliness,” because it most intimately concerns a godly life, because those who receive it in their hearts become thereby godly men, and because, moreover, it builds up believers in godliness, and is to them a grand motive for the reverent love and holy fear of the Lord their God.

Let so much as we have already spoken stand for our preface, and let us now, by the Holy Spirit’s aid, consider one by one the six branches of the mystery which is now before us.

I. The first sentence is “GOD WAS MANIFESTED IN THE FLESH.”

I believe that our version is the correct one, but the fiercest battles have been held over this sentence. It is asserted that the word *Theos* is a corruption for “*Os*,” so that, instead of reading “*God* was manifest in the flesh,” we should read, “*who* was manifest in the flesh.” There is very little occasion for fighting about this matter, for if the text does not say “God was manifest in the flesh,” who does it say was manifest in the flesh? Either a man, or an angel, or a devil. Does it tell us that a man was manifest in the flesh? Assuredly that cannot be its teachings, for every man is manifest in the flesh, and there is no sense whatever in making such a statement concerning any mere man, and then calling it a mystery.

Was it an angel, then? But what angel was ever manifested in the flesh? And if he were, would it be at all a mystery that he should be “seen of angels”? Is it a wonder for an angel to see an angel? Can it be that the devil was manifest in the flesh? If so, he has been “received up into glory,” which, let us hope, is not the case. Well, if it was neither a man, nor an angel, nor a devil, who was manifest in the flesh, surely He must have been God, and so, if the word be not there, the sense must be there, or else nonsense.

We believe that, if criticism should grind the text in a mill, it would get out of it no more and no less than the sense expressed by our grand old version. God Himself was manifest in the flesh. What a mystery is this! A mystery of mysteries! God the invisible was manifest, God the spiritual dwelt in flesh, God the infinite, uncontained, boundless, was manifest in the flesh. What infinite leagues our thought must traverse between Godhead, Self-existent, and therefore, full of power and self-sufficiency, before we have descended to the far-down level of poor flesh, which is as grass at its best, and dust in its essence! Where find we a greater contrast than between God and flesh, and yet the two are blended in the incarnation of the Savior. God was manifest in the flesh, truly God, not God humanized, but God as God. He was manifest in real flesh, not in manhood deified and made superhuman, but in actual flesh—

*“Oh joy! there sits in our flesh,
Upon a throne of light,
One of a human mother born,
In perfect Godhead bright!”*

*Forever God, forever man,
My Jesus shall endure;
And fix’d on Him, my hope remains
Eternally secure.”*

Matchless truth, let the church never fail to set it forth, for it is essential to the world’s salvation that this doctrine of the incarnation be made fully known.

O my brethren, since it is “without controversy,” let us not controvert but sit down and feed upon it. What a miracle of condescension is here, that God should manifest Himself in flesh. It needs not so much to be preached upon as to be pondered in the heart. It needs that you sit down in quiet, and consider how He who made you became like you, He who is your God became your brother man. He who is adored of angels once lay in a manger, He who feeds all living things hungered and was athirst, He who oversees all worlds as God, was, as a man, made to sleep, to suffer, and to die like yourselves. This is a statement not easily to be believed. If He had not been beheld by many witnesses, so that men handled Him, looked upon Him, and heard Him speak, it were a thing not readily to be accepted that so divine a person should be manifest in flesh. It is a wonder of condescension!

And it is a marvel, too, of benediction, for God’s manifestation in human flesh conveys a thousand blessings to us. Bethlehem’s star is the morning star of hope to believers. Now man is nearest to God. Never was God manifest in angel nature, but He is manifest in flesh. Now, between poor puny man that is born of a woman, and the infinite God, there is a bond of union of the most wonderful kind. God and man in one person is the Lord Jesus Christ! This brings our manhood near to God, and by so doing it ennoble our nature, it lifts us up from the dunghill and sets us among princes, while at the same time it enriches us by endowing our manhood with all the glory of Christ Jesus in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Lift up your eyes, you down-trodden sons of man! If you be men you have a brotherhood with Christ, and Christ is God. O you who have begun to despise yourselves and think that you are merely sent to be drudges upon earth, and slaves of sin, lift up your heads and look for redemption in the Son of Man, who has broken the captives’ bonds. If you be believers in the Christ of God, then are you also the children of God, and if children then heirs—heirs of God, joint heirs with Jesus Christ.

What a fullness of consolation there is in this truth, as well as of benediction, for if the Son of God be man, then He understands me and will have a fellow feeling for me. He knows my unfitness to worship sometimes—He knows my tendencies to grow weary and dull—He knows my pains, my trials, and my griefs—

*“He knows what fierce temptations mean,
For He has felt the same.”*

Man, truly man, yet sitting at the right hand of the Father, You, O Savior, are the delight of my soul. Is there not the richest comfort in this for you, the people of God?

And withal, there is instruction, too, for God was manifest in the flesh, and if you desire to see God, you must see Him in Christ Jesus. It does not say God was veiled in the flesh, though under certain aspects that might be true, but God was “*manifest in the flesh.*” The brightness of the sun might put out our eyes if we gazed upon it, and we must look through dim glass, and then the sun is manifested to us, so the excessive glory of the infinite Godhead cannot be borne by our mind’s eye till it comes into communication and union with the nature of man, and then God is manifest to us.

My soul, never try to gaze upon an absolute God, the brightness will blind your eye, even our God is a consuming fire! Ask not to see God in fire in the bush, nor God in lightning upon Mount Sinai, be satisfied to see God in the man Christ Jesus, for there God is manifested. Not all the glory of the sky, and of the sea, nor the wonders of creation or providence, can set forth the Deity as does the Son of Mary, who from the manger went to the cross, and from the cross to the tomb, and from the tomb to His eternal throne. Behold you now the Lamb of God, for God is manifest in Him! People of God, look nowhere else for God.

I shall leave the point when I have put a personal question. Have we each one of us seen God in Christ Jesus? Remember, this is essential to salvation. We speak not now that which is harsh or severe, we only speak that which is honest and true, if you rebel against it we still can say no less. You cannot be right anywhere unless you are right about the person of the Lord Jesus. If you do not accept Him as the Son of God He cannot be a Savior to you, and without Him for a Savior you are as surely lost as you are born, whatever profession you may make. I trust we can say, many of us, “Yes, Jesus Christ is to us Lord, to the glory of God the Father, and we worship Him, and obey Him, putting all our trust in Him, and rendering our adoration to Him.” If you be not now His worshippers, may the blessed Spirit bring you to Jesus, and not suffer you to attempt to go to the Father first, for the Lord Jesus has told us “No man comes unto the Father but by me.” May you go to the throne of God by the way of the cross, for that is the only way, and may you go by that road at once.

II. The second clause concerns our Lord’s vindication by the Spirit. He who was “manifest in the flesh” was also “JUSTIFIED IN THE SPIRIT.”

When our Lord came in human flesh, and declared to be the Son of God there were many reasons why His statement would be doubted, for He came in such poverty, weakness, and disrepute. In any case, the appearance of God in flesh would need great proof, but the circumstances which surrounded our Savior were such as to cast, especially in carnal minds, great doubt upon His pretensions, our Lord, however the flesh might seem to cloud His claims, was “justified in the Spirit,” which may mean, and perhaps does, that His spiritual nature as man was so elevated by His Godhead that it abundantly justified His claim to be the Son of God. What a spirit was His for purity and dignity! What nobility ever came near to His? What a mind was His, what wisdom dwelt in Him! Even as a child He baffled Rabbis, and as a man He confounded all who would entrap Him in His speech. Was there ever such teaching as His? Listen to Him, and you feel that the spirit which flashes from those eyes and distils from those lips justifies His claim to be the Son of the Highest.

Hearken also to His words of command, when His Godhead glows through His humanity and proves Him divine. He speaks, and it is done, He commands and it stands fast. At His bidding waves sleep and winds rest, pain flies, strength returns, health smiles, and death lives! Has not His spiritual nature, by deeds so astounding, fully justified Him?

And see, dear friends, how He was justified—not only by His own spirit, which wrought beyond the reach and compass of all other spirits—but He was justified by the Holy Spirit which rested upon Him without measure, and made His human spirit strong. It was this anointing which made Him the chief of all prophets, teachers, and revealers of the mind of God. All who heard Him confessed His unrivalled power, even when they resisted it. The Spirit of God bore witness in Him—His words were full of unction, the Spirit of God bore witness with Him—His words went to men’s hearts. The Spirit of God

bore witness to Christ, and justified all His claims at the time of His baptism, when out of the excellent glory there appeared the form of a dove, and a voice cried out of heaven, “This is my beloved Son.” That same Spirit again justified Him audibly again in His transfiguration, but silently, and yet more evidently, the seal of God was always on Him, everywhere the Spirit witnessed to Him. Only blind eyes, blinded by hate, refused to see the divine light which hung about His every word and act, as radiance enrobes a star.

Above all, our Lord’s claims were justified by the Spirit in His resurrection, when He was “declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the Spirit of holiness by His resurrection from the dead.” Nor less so when, after forty days, He was received up into glory, and the Spirit of God justified all that Christ had said, by coming down like a rushing mighty wind and cloven tongues of fire, and resting upon His disciples. If Christ had not risen from the dead He would have been a convicted impostor, and after His rising from the dead, if the Spirit of God had not been given, His claim would still have remained under a cloud! But now it is clear that “He has ascended on high, and received gifts for men, yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them,” for the scattering of the Spirit of God among men was that promised largess which our mighty Conqueror distributed among His people, when He entered upon the possession of His crown.

The Holy Spirit has justified Christ. This is a part of the testimony of the church—that Christ’s claims are to be justified by the spirit of His teaching, and also by the Holy Spirit whose supernatural power will accompany the proclamation of the Gospel. Now, let the church always stand to this. I am afraid we are on wrong ground when we begin to defend the Gospel by mere reason. The true defense of the Gospel is the Spirit of Christ, Jesus is justified in the Spirit, and needs no other justification. O, brethren, if we exhibit the Spirit of Christ, we shall answer cavilers, and if the Spirit of God rests on the ministry of the church, cavilers will cease to cavil, they will see her glory and they will be ashamed. The Holy Ghost is our strength, our glory, the abiding witness that our great Leader is Lord and God.

Brethren, has the Holy Spirit ever justified Christ in your soul? He has come to save, has the Holy Spirit revealed Him as your Savior? He has come to blot out sin, has the Holy Ghost ever revealed Him in all His power to pardon you? This is the sure vindication of Christ—your own personal experience of His preciousness and His power, if the Holy Ghost has given you that, none can confound you, but if you have it not you lack the one thing needful. God grant you may not lack it long!

III. The third clause of our hexapla is, “SEEN OF ANGELS.”

This is an important point, for angels had waited to see the Lord, patiently gazing on the mercy seat. There had been rumors in heaven of this mystery of the manifold wisdom of God, but they had not understood it, and it is now in Christ that the mystery of incarnate God has been revealed to them. If I may so say, the brightness of the Godhead had confounded even the angels, they were not able to see God, but when God came and manifested Himself in the flesh, then God was seen of angels. The Godhead was seen in Christ by angels, as they had never seen it before. They had beheld the attribute of justice, they had seen the attribute of power, they had marked the attribute of wisdom, and seen the prerogative of sovereignty, but never had angels seen love, and condescension, and tenderness, and pity, in God as they saw these things resplendent in the person and the life of Christ. They were astounded to think that God was such a one.

They knew Him to be thrice holy, for they had chanted “Holy, holy, holy,” in their perpetual sanctus, but they did not know Him to be love—essential love—as they knew it when they saw that “He spared not his own Son, but freely delivered Him up for us all.” The angels, seeing God thus manifest in flesh, ministered to Him, they watched around the manger, they were messengers to His foster parent to warn him of intended evil to the child, and they waited on the Redeemer in the desert of His temptation. One of their number strengthened Him in the garden, another rolled away the stone from His grave, while others sat at the head and foot of the sepulcher where Jesus had lain. I doubt not it is true as we sang just now—

*“They brought His chariot from above,
To bear Him to His throne;
Clapped their triumphant wings, and cried,
‘The glorious work is done.’”*

Jesus was all along seen of angels, and this is one reason why they sing so sweetly of Him—why they tune their notes so heartily to the song, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain,” for they saw Him live, and die, saw Him labor and suffer, and therefore is their song so vivid and so full of adoration. “You were slain,” say they, though they cannot add, “and have redeemed us unto God by your blood.”

Now the joy of this truth lies here, it brings the angel host so near to us, for they saw Jesus and waited on Him, and we see Him, and therefore our eyes and the angels’ eyes meet upon the person of Christ. We have one common love, one common Lord, and now the ministering spirits that waited upon Him are ready to wait upon us. They love the members for the sake of the Head. Beloved, we rejoice this day to know that Christ is head of angels and principalities and powers, as well as head of His church, and so in Him broken unity is restored, and the household of God is one in Him. Angelic eyes beheld and loved, they love on still, and wonder yet. Fair spirits, charmed with the beauty of our Bridegroom, you rejoice with us, and make it your delight to swell His train!

One question and we leave the point. Have you ever seen Jesus? He was seen of angels. Has your eye ever seen Him—your inner, spiritual eye? If not, the Lord help you this morning to look unto Him and be saved! It is nothing that He was seen of angels, unless He be seen of me also, even as of one born out of due time. O! to see Him as my Savior, my all, and rest in Him! This is the main business. May God grant us that gladness!

IV. Briefly, the fourth part of the great mystery does not look, at first sight, to be at all mysterious. There is much of mystery in the facts that God was “manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, and seen of angels,” but the next appears very common place—“PREACHED UNTO THE GENTILES.”

Yet it is not without a marvel, those who reflect will see a great mystery of grace in it. Until Christ came, nothing was “preached to the Gentiles.” They were accounted dogs, and few were the crumbs that fell to them from the master’s table, but after our Lord had ascended on high He was proclaimed to the Gentiles. To a Jew especially this would seem a very strange thing, the Jew thought that if the Gentile perished, it was but a matter of course, but for the Gentiles to be visited with the Gospel was strange indeed. That God should work effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision was to them readily a matter of faith, but that the same should be equally mighty in Paul towards the Gentiles was incredible yet true.

Well, blessed be God, you and I are partakers in this mystery, for we have heard and believed the love which God has toward us. We are Gentiles also, but unto us has the Gospel been preached as well as unto the ancient people, yea, and we have been more highly favored than they, for at this day, more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife. God has multiplied the seed of Abraham after the Spirit among the Gentiles, whereas the seed of Abraham after the flesh have, in these times, rejected the Savior. Rejoice then, in the mystery, that Christ is *preached* among the Gentiles. Mark you, *preached!* For He is to be set forth in that manner. The church is ever to maintain this great, uncontroverted mystery, that the setting forth of Christ to the Gentiles is to be by preaching, and not by any other means of man’s devising.

Suppose I could take my pencil now, and draw the Savior with such matchless skill, that a Raffaele or a Titian could not rival me, God has never ordained that so Christ should so be set forth to the Gentiles. Or, suppose I should perform the ceremony of the mass with all the exactness, and with all the gorgeousness which the Church of Rome would require, such a setting forth of Christ among the Gentiles would not be according to the divine mystery. Christ is to be *preached* among the Gentiles, the appointed way of manifesting the incarnate God to the sons of men is by preaching—the church must always maintain this. The strongest castle of the walls of Zion for offense and defense must ever be the

pulpit. God is pleased by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. I hate to see, as I do sometimes, in certain modern buildings, the pulpit stuck in the corner, and the altar in the most conspicuous place. The altar of sacrifice, indeed, the place of defilement and remembrance of sin, how comes that in the holy place at all? God has never ordained it to be there. Where in Holy Scripture have we mention of a material altar in the assemblies of believers? Our only altar is the spiritual altar of our Lord's person, whereof they have no right to eat that serve the tabernacle of outward forms of rites and ceremonies. Altars belong to Jews and heathens, and even they never bow before them, none but your Popish idolaters have fallen so low as that. The most prominent agency in the church of God is the preaching of Christ—this is the trumpet of heaven and the battering ram of hell! By this door salvation comes, for faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God, and how shall they hear without a preacher?

God's way of creating faith in men's hearts is not by pictures, music, or symbols, but by the hearing of the Word of God. This may seem a strange thing, and strange let it seem, for it is a mystery, and a great mystery, but a fact beyond all controversy, forever let the church maintain that Christ is to be preached unto the Gentiles. A part of the greatness of the mystery lies in the persons who preached the Gospel. It was a strange thing that Jesus should be preached unto the Gentiles by unlearned and ignorant men. One of the apostles, it is true, was of another class, but he declares that he never preached with excellence of speech, but in all simplicity he laid bare the mystery of God in plain language. It was a wonder that Christ should be preached to the Gentiles so rapidly.

It was but the other day the hundred and twenty were in the upper room, and within a few years there was no part of the civilized globe which had not heard the name of Jesus, they had penetrated Scythia, they had subdued the barbarians, their only weapon being the cross, they had triumphed at Athens, in the stronghold of classic learning, they had passed into Rome, and set up the cross amidst the luxurious vices of the capital. No place was untrodden by the Christian missionary, and no place was unaffected by the power of the Gospel which he preached. This is a great mystery, the Lord repeat the mystery again and again! O that preaching might once again be recognized to be God's power unto salvation, and used everywhere—in the church, in the lecture hall, in the street—in foreign lands and at home, for the voice of truth in the preaching of Jesus is the great power of God.

One question here, and we leave it—have you reverently heard the Gospel? for there goes with the declaration that God saves through preaching, the warning, "Take heed how you hear," for if God waits to bless by hearing, woe unto the men who hear inattentively and disrespectfully, woe unto the hearers only who are not doers of the Word! A responsibility goes with hearing, and God grant that you may be obedient hearers, so that we who preach may give a good account of you at the last, that our ministry may not have been in vain, but may have been to you the voice of God to your salvation.

V. And now the fifth part of the mystery is a very remarkable one, like that which preceded it does not appear to be mysterious on the surface, but it is so, "BELIEVED ON IN THE WORLD."

This is the most glorious of all the six points, this wonderful fact that Jesus is "believed on in the world." Why, when the humble preachers went out first to tell of Jesus, their story was so strange you could not imagine that any would believe it. And then the doctrines that they taught were so contrary to all the prejudices of flesh and blood, so humbling to human pride, so insulting to all our self-esteem, that it was not probable that men would accept them. And the world, too, what a world it was! It was steeped up to its throat in cruelty, in vice, in luxury, in sins infamous and unmentionable, and was it likely that a pure Savior, with a perfect doctrine like His, would find followers? But He did, He was "believed on in the world."

Why, I think the first preachers must have been ready to leap for joy when they found that men believed them. If I had been Peter, I would scarce have slept for joy for many a night if I had found three thousand willing to believe my testimony, and willing to be baptized into Christ! And Paul—oh, I think, with all his sorrows, he must have been a very happy man—must have been struck with wonder to see

that though he went into idolatrous lands to tell this new, and strange, and incredible story, yet in every place there were found men or women who received it joyfully.

Mark well that the church is bound to maintain this mystery, that it is by believing in Christ that the efficacy of His sacrifice comes to men. The mystery is not that Christ is served in the world, that is not put here, not that Christ is worshipped in the world, that is not the first point—those things will be sure to follow, but the vital mystery is that Christ is “believed on in the world,” that is to say, trusted as the Savior. Men leave all other trusts, and trust in Him, they give up their self-righteousness, they leave their vaunted sacraments, they forsake all ways and modes of self-salvation, and come and trust in Christ—this is the great mystery. “Well,” says one, “I do not see that there is a mystery in it.” Have you ever believed in Jesus yourself, beloved friend? If you have, you will say, “This is the finger of God.” Belief in Jesus is as great a work of divine power as the making of this globe.

One of the visitors to this place lately said, “I am willing to be a believer, if the preacher can persuade me.” Very likely, but no preacher can create true faith—it needs a mightier power than the preacher’s, even the power of the Holy Ghost. God gives to His elect the blessing of faith, and others willfully remain in unbelief. Faith, simple as it is, is supernatural, divine, and not to be attained by human aid, nor human eloquence, they who have it know that it is a blessed mystery, this believing on Jesus Christ in the world.

Have you this faith? Do you believe in Jesus? Everything else in my text leads up to this. If He is manifested in the flesh, what is that unless I believe in Him? What if He be justified in the Spirit. What is that unless faith in Him justifies me? What if He be seen of angels, how does that help me unless I see Him too? And even if He be preached among the Gentiles, that does but involve greater guilt upon my soul if, after hearing, I have not believed in Him. O dear hearers, I may not long speak to you, and every time that I am kept away from addressing you I feel a deep anxiety that by some means my preaching may be made effectual to your salvation. Many of you have believed in my Lord—this is my comfort, but on the other hand, how many there are who still hear, and hear, and hear, and that is all. How long halt you? How long cause you us to labor for nothing? No one is so worth trusting as the Savior is, and nothing is so true as that He came to save sinners.

VI. The last point of the church’s witness is that Jesus was “RECEIVED UP IN GLORY.”

Only this word about it, He was so received because His work is finished. He would never have gone into His glory if He had not finished all His toil. He would have accepted no reward had He not fully earned it. My soul, do you believe that Christ is received up into glory, that will let you know that you are resting in a finished work, an atonement which has put away all sin, a satisfaction which has made all believers accepted in the Beloved. He has gone into glory, thus He is personally rewarded, and moreover, He has thus representatively taken possession of all that He has purchased. Is Christ in glory? then the believer is in glory, not literally but in his covenant Head. What Christ takes possession of He claims in our name, “I go to prepare a place for you.” O you who sorrow over the present, rejoice also, for even now at this moment heaven is yours—your Jesus has taken possession in your name.

And oh, it is joyous to know that our great Lord is eternally exalted! If He were not exalted what comfort could we have? He is received up into glory! Men say He is not God—they cannot hurt Him, for He is received up into glory! They revile His Gospel—they cannot dim the luster of His crown, for He is received up into glory! They would fain slay His people if they could, but *He* is received up into glory! They struggle and they strive against His cause, and would fain overthrow it, but O, what matters it, He is everlastingly exalted, and He will shortly come—that same Jesus who was received into glory shall so come, in like manner as He was seen to go up into heaven. Here are great wells of comfort. He has to His glory gone, and has taken to Himself His great power, but every hour is bringing nearer the time when He shall lay bare His sword in the midst of His foes, and shall unveil His face in the midst of His friends. Let us rejoice in Him this day, and go our way to bear, with all the church of the living God, the six-fold testimony of our text concerning our precious Savior. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—LUKE 2:1-32.

Taken from The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.